

## International

# In war-torn Sudan, volunteers turn schools into hospitals

## Hospital provides free general medical care and other services

**OMDURMAN:** In a Sudanese school turned makeshift hospital, a volunteer doctor hooks up a patient lying on a desk to an intravenous drip while nurses hand out medicines donated by neighbors.

As war has raged for six weeks and shuttered or destroyed many clinics, this school building in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city across the Nile, has become an emergency healthcare centre. A chalk message written on a blackboard outside says the volunteer-run field hospital provides free general medical care, minor operations and other services.

The volunteer medics treat children and people with diabetes, hypertension and other chronic illnesses, which are "now 10 times deadlier than bullets," said the doctor, Mohammed al-Taher.

Young activists have taken matters into their own hands since fighting erupted on April 15 between the army led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces of his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

In times of relative peace, the activists, known as local "resistance committees", used to organize pro-democracy protests. Now they collect water and food and run makeshift clinics for patients with nowhere else to go.

The public health sector has long been fragile in Sudan, where 65 per cent of the population lives in poverty. Now it faces compounded challenges, with three quarters of hospitals in combat zones out of service, according to the country's doctors' union.

### 'Bring medicine'

The fighting has left 12,000 dialysis patients at risk of dying as hospitals have run out of medication and fuel to power generators, the union said.

Since the war erupted, at least 1,800 people have been killed. More than a million have been displaced

within Sudan and nearly 350,000 have fled to other countries. The fighting has also led many health professionals to flee and driven a "real brain drain", says the UN World Health Organization.

Remaining medical staff are now teaching volunteers to tend to the wounded. "We train young people in first aid in case they are faced with wounded people in the midst of combat," Taher said. Maha Mohammed is one of many volunteers looking after fellow Sudanese citizens in need. She runs the small field hospital's pharmacy, its shelves sparsely stocked with medicine and serum bags. The young woman in a black abaya pleaded for "more donations" as the bulk of food and medical aid have either been looted or remain stuck at the sites of violent battles.

### 'This war will pass'

The fighting has impeded the delivery of the humanitarian aid that 25 million people — over half the population — now desperately need, according to the UN. Aid workers, who count 18 deaths among their ranks, say it is difficult for aid to flow despite the multiple ceasefires that have been agreed and quickly violated.

In a "major breakthrough", the World Food Programme said Monday that it had begun reaching thousands of Khartoum's trapped residents.

Mohammed said that "we must help each other before expecting foreign help. I urge people who have medicine at home to bring it here."

At the hospital, two women stood behind a window, registering new patients lined up in the courtyard. "Our neighborhood is under fire, many hospitals had to close," volunteer Ashraf told AFP. "So people come here to get free treatment from doctors in the neighborhood." There are fears that the summer rainy season will soon bring seasonal epidemics



**OMDURMAN:** Relatives stand by a patient at a makeshift emergency room set-up by Sudanese volunteers in a school building in Omdurman, the capital's twin city, amid ongoing fighting between the forces of two rival generals. — AFP

like malaria, which wreaks havoc in Sudan every year, while a shortage of drinking water could drive a cholera outbreak.

The rains will also make parts of Sudan hard to reach, according to aid agencies. But Ashraf remained optimistic that his home country, which has

been ravaged by multiple civil wars and military coups since gaining independence in 1956, will also overcome the current turmoil.

"This war will pass," he said. "We have seen many crises in Sudan, and each time we think: This will be the last. But this one will end too." — AFP

## Armed groups clash in streets of Tripoli

**TRIPOLI:** Gunshots rang out in Libya's capital on Monday following hours of fighting between two armed groups both aligned with the divided country's UN-backed government, local medics and media reported. Several residents in Tripoli were lightly wounded in the clashes which began Sunday night and spread across several neighborhoods. Fighters from rival militias — the Al-Raada Force and the 444 Brigade, both of which are loyal to interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's Tripoli-based

government — clashed after a member of the 444 Brigade was arrested. Libyan television and online media showed videos of the fighting posted online by social media users. An elderly man "was injured in the arm by shrapnel as he fled his home in Ain Zara by car", the Tripoli Rescue Service said on its Facebook page, also condemning damage to ambulances during the gun battles.

On Sunday, armored vehicles and fighters were seen deploying in Jabra Street, a busy commercial area in the capital's east, and the central Ras Hassan residential district. After a lull in the fighting, heavy and light weapons fire was heard, along with ambulance sirens, in the eastern suburbs of Ain Zara and Fornaj until 3:00 am (0100 GMT) Monday, according to an AFP correspondent.

The University of Tripoli said Monday it was forced to "close its doors" and suspend exams as a

could lay waste to entire industries.

The latest statement, housed on the website of US-based non-profit Center for AI Safety, gave no detail of the potential existential threat posed by AI. The center said the "succinct statement" was meant to open up a discussion on the dangers of the technology. Several of the signatories, including Geoffrey Hinton, who created some of the technology underlying AI systems and is known as one of the godfathers of the industry, have made similar warnings in the past.

Their biggest worry has been the rise of so-called artificial general intelligence (AGI) — a loosely defined concept for a moment when machines become capable of performing wide-ranging functions and can develop their own programming. The fear is that humans would no longer have control over superintelligent machines, which experts have warned could have disastrous consequences for the species and the planet. Dozens of academics and specialists from companies including Google and Microsoft — both leaders in the AI field — signed the statement. It comes two months after Tesla boss Elon Musk and hundreds of others issued an open letter calling for a pause in the development of such technology until it could be shown to be safe. However, Musk's letter sparked widespread criticism that dire warnings of societal collapse were hugely exaggerated and often reflected the talking points of AI boosters. — AFP

political reforms, calling to amend a number of laws seen as restricting political freedoms. Mutairi proposed to amend a controversial law that bars for life those convicted for political crimes from contesting parliamentary polls, and another calling to approve allowing groups to run in elections.

The former lawmaker also proposed to amend a law that bars courts from hearing cases related to citizenship disputes, and also called for amending a law that governs the constitutional court to prevent dissolving National Assemblies. As candidates feel that some Kuwaiti voters appear to be no longer interested in the election process because polls have been frequently repeated in the past few years, they continued to appeal to voters. Hamad Al-Mudlej, a member of the 2022 Assembly, called on Kuwaiti voters to turn out in large numbers to prevent what he called forces of corruption from controlling the Assembly.

Contacted by AFP on Tuesday, an official in Tonghai's publicity department denied the Internet outages, but declined to comment further. China has sought to more tightly control religion since President Xi Jinping came to power a decade ago, and in its crackdown on Muslims, Beijing claims it is working to combat terrorism and extremist thought.

An estimated one million Uyghurs, Hui and other Muslim minorities have been detained in the western Xinjiang region since 2017 under a government campaign that the United States and rights groups have called a genocide. And while the impact on communities outside Xinjiang has been milder, many have seen their mosques demolished or "coercively renovated" to match official notions of Chinese aesthetics, said David Stroup, an expert on the Hui at Britain's University of Manchester. — AFP

## Zionist entity revives flashpoint W Bank settlement

**BURQA:** Zionist entity started reviving a flashpoint outpost settlement in the occupied West Bank on Monday, AFP journalists said, constructing a building at the site which has drawn international attention. Using a truck, diggers and an earth roller, work got underway to erect a portable building at the northern West Bank site.

AFP journalists saw Zionist soldiers guarding around 20 people carrying out construction work at the Homesh site, which Zionist entity evacuated nearly two decades ago. The latest development comes weeks after the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged his government had no plans to reconstruct the site, after a parliamentary vote on the matter sparked ire abroad.

It was hailed as a "moving historic moment" by Zionist's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir — an extreme-right settler. Lawmakers in March voted to annul part of a law which banned Zionists from living in areas of the West Bank which the state evacuated in 2005, the same year Zionist entity withdrew from the Gaza Strip.

"The government has no intention of establishing new communities in these areas," Netanyahu's office said in March. Zionist's military occupation of the West Bank has been in force since the 1967 Six-Day War. Neither the army nor the defence ministry commented on their role in Monday's developments at Homesh when contacted by AFP.

The civilians at the site refused to discuss the matter when approached by AFP journalists. The United States, Zionist entity's top ally, said this month it was "deeply troubled by the Zionist government's order

legislator Ali Bouzribah, from the rival eastern parliament, whose home had reportedly been hit in strikes three days earlier.

The eastern-based Parliament on Monday denounced the strikes against Zawiya, saying it was an operation to "settle political scores rather than fight against traffickers as claimed" by the Dbeibah government. In response, the US embassy in Tripoli said it was monitoring the situation with "concern amid reports of weapons being used in civilian areas and the potential for further violence". "Libyan leaders should do everything they can to de-escalate and take every precaution to protect the lives of civilians," it tweeted.

Britain branded as "unacceptable" the use of weapons that put civilian lives at risk, and called on all those involved to de-escalate, its embassy said on Twitter. — AFP

## Experts warn AI poses 'risk of extinction'

**PARIS:** Global leaders should be working to reduce "the risk of extinction" from artificial intelligence technology, a group of industry chiefs and experts warned on Tuesday. A one-line statement signed by dozens of specialists, including Sam Altman whose firm OpenAI created the ChatGPT bot, said tackling the risks from AI should be "a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war".

ChatGPT burst into the spotlight late last year, demonstrating an ability to generate essays, poems and conversations from the briefest of prompts. The program's wild success sparked a gold rush with billions of dollars of investment into the field, but critics and insiders have raised the alarm. Common worries include the possibility that chatbots could flood the web with disinformation, that biased algorithms will churn out racist material, or that AI-powered automation

## 207 candidates to run in polls after...

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The fire department said on Tuesday it has completed its preparations to provide protection to some 119 election centers set up at schools in the five electoral districts. Although the election campaign picked up some steam in the past few days, it has remained way below the intensity seen in previous elections. Many candidates have not even set up election headquarters and have preferred to address rallies either at hotels or social halls.

Former MP Saud Al-Mutairi proposed what he described as a national charter for comprehensive

## China makes arrests after mosque...

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had struggled intermittently with Internet outages and other connectivity issues since the clashes, they added. A notice issued Sunday by the Tonghai government — which administers Nagu — said it had opened an investigation into "a case that severely disrupted social management and order". The notice ordered those involved to "immediately stop all illegal and criminal acts", vowing to "severely punish" anyone who refuses to turn themselves in. Those who voluntarily surrender before June 6 will be treated with leniency, the notice added.



**BURQA:** Zionist settlers erect a tent at the outpost of Homesh in the occupied West Bank. Zionist settlers started reviving the flashpoint outpost settlement in the occupied West Bank, which had been evacuated nearly two decades prior, constructing a building at the site which has drawn international attention. — AFP

that allows its citizens to establish a permanent presence in the Homesh outpost". — AFP

Washington and the wider international community view Zionist settlements built in the Palestinian territories as illegal and a barrier to peace. The European Union last week pressed Israel to "cease the policy of settlement expansion" and condemned increased settler violence against Palestinians. — AFP

## Saudi kidnapped in Lebanon freed...

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A senior Lebanese security source had told AFP late Monday that unidentified assailants dressed as security personnel and driving a four-wheel-drive vehicle had kidnapped the Saudi national on the Beirut seafloor, where he had been in a restaurant. Prime Minister Najib Mikati congratulated the army on the "great effort deployed to release him and arrest those involved in the kidnapping". According to Saudi government-owned television channel Al-Ekhabriya, the kidnappers had demanded a ransom. Lebanese security forces frequently target parts of the Syrian border area in connection with

drug trafficking. Most of the Middle East region's Captagon is produced in Syria and Lebanon and smuggled to its main consumer market in the Gulf.

Kidnappings of foreign nationals have been rare in recent years in Lebanon, which since late 2019 has been facing devastating economic crisis that has impoverished the population. In July last year, a Saudi national was abducted on arrival at Beirut airport. Since 2021, Saudis have had to obtain their government's permission before travelling to Lebanon due to strained diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Riyadh returned its ambassador to Beirut in April 2022, just over five months after recalling him amid a diplomatic dispute pitting Lebanon against several Gulf monarchies. Relations between Beirut and Gulf Arab states had become strained over the growing regional influence of Lebanon's pro-Iranian movement Hezbollah. — AFP